No. 88

New Year's Sermon

Jan. 1821
John ix. 2. "I must work the works of him, that sent me, while it is day; the night cometh, when no man can work."

This declaration of our Saviour is full of instruction. Whether we consider it with reference to his own character as an individual, or with reference to the great general truth to which it teaches, it conveys a most useful and solemn lesson. The state of feeling, which it inculcates in the mind of the Christian, is such as must tend to enkindle reverence for his divine character. It discovers such an abiding sense of the importance, solemnity of the office, in which he was engaged, so strong a sense of a duty so important, so weighty, that man had ever before been called upon to discharge, were but trifle, as cannot fail to give us a practical conviction of his purity and correctness in the great work committed to him.
to him. It was his office to instruct the world by authority from God, to be the medium of communication from heaven to earth, to send forth the light of divine truth. His ministry, however, great as were its objects, was a brief one; even that brief space was broken by embarrassments, persecution by suffering, by all the arts of malignant opposition. Doubtless it was under the strong sense of the immovable importance of his office as the Messenger of God, with the knowledge that the cross would soon terminate his course of duty on earth, that he uttered these memorable words, "I must work today. There is something extremely touching and impressive in these expressions, as used by ourselves. With how much humility does he acknowledge his dependence on God, and how does his every thought accord to be sanctified by a reverence to the Most High. Instead of claiming equality with God, he speaks of himself as acting in a delegated office; he affirms that he is not by himself that the work of Him, who sent him, he must diligently perform, such are the expressions of a being, equal in power and glory with the All--they are rather the expressions of one, who feels that he acts only by authority derived from God, of that he is His Messenger, his Agent. If of me too, who feels most deeply that his time is precious, may not be wasted?

This continent, oh seems to have exerted its full influence in the mind of our Lord, it becomes us at this time humbly to cherish. We have just passed the bounds of

one of the divisions in the life of man, we should pause on the journey, y while we raise the tribute of gratitude to heaven for preservation of his blessings, it should be the language of each one of us, "I must work the weeks of him that sent me to me, while it is day, the night cometh, when no man can work." We, striving, like our Lord, have our tasks assigned to us, while we are in this world, we are agents under God, solemnly charged to finish the work, oh! He has given us to do. It is true, our office of our duties are far different from those which calls to perform. None of us is, as he was, the Messenger of God, no one of us is, as he was, the Son of God. We move in a
Now when our characters, that shall constitute their eternity, and what time have we for this important, this mighty task? The period of our life on earth—how long that may be, we cannot know;—but we do know that at the longest, it must be short. We take but a step from the cradle to the grave; on that step depend innumerable consequences. After some rise great, a few mean appear; and so, we are gone. We look around a few times on the scene, if then we are gone. This life may be called earth, then sink into the grave. This life may be called the threshold of existence, we are beyond it, we have crossed it, and yet the threshold of existence, we are beyond it, we have crossed it, and yet.

The means of moral, intellectual, & religious improvement are placed in our hands, if these are the hand with the utmost zeal, that we may be prepared for other scenes & brighter sciences. In this life, there is that to be done, the effects of which may never cease! the principles, which we imbibed, the actions we perform, may strike a

honor & reverence in all. Our minds are not to the residence of the inspiration of the Most High, nor are we raised up for the purpose of instructing mankind in religion by the authority of God, nor of opening an impetus to the spiritual renovation of the world. Such was the sublime office of the heavenly calling of our Lord; but such are not ours. Still, we, as well as our days, have limitations in to deal that we must do, & but a short time to accomplish the task. We go into this world as stewards under a heavenly Master; we have immortal minds, & these minds are to be purified, enlightened, strengthened; we have souls that must live forever. These souls are to be sanctified, that they may be saved; these means of moral, intellectual, & religious improvement are placed in our hands, if these are the hand with the utmost zeal, that we may be prepared for other scenes & brighter sciences. In this life, there is that to be done, the effects of which may never cease!
thus presented to us. The first belief. Time is not a time to pause, to dwell upon our thoughts: it is a good time to make the most of every occasion for amusement. One reason why we think so little of the value of our time, is that we break life down into portions, yeanuds each of these portions as by itself trivial and insconsiderable, thus we pass on from one fragment of life to another, each seems too small to attract attention. But it is a great thing to acquire the habit of considering time in its minutest divisions as the most important treasure we have, to be sensible of how we are led by the smallest motion of our life, in its severest flight. Again, we are very apt to say, it is not much, but the longer we shall be sensible, if we are not now, that a year is a large stroke in the little life of man. Let us reflect for a few moments on the importance of a single year: that thus we may see what motives we have to diligence in the work God hath given us to do, and that the years in which we can work may not be lost. A single year, then, is of great importance to us, because what we think in a great one, is say, is done, in a year, may influence to a high degree; almost unawares, the character of our life may have an effect, of what we may carry with us to the grave. Our minds are essentially busy; they are constantly employed about whatever is good, or what is bad, about important subjects or idle trifles. The sum total of our thoughts in the course of a single year is beyond all calculation. Our minds are the engines of our thoughts in a vacuum as much as the course of a one stream. The mental power cannot be idle. If we do not furnish them with employment, they will seek it for themselves. This being the case, we see at once how much must depend on the thoughts we think. Thoughts arise in our minds in the course of a year. If they are pure, calm, and well directed, they will in a proper manner about proper objects, they will do much to bring us on in the path of mental greatness. They will be the good seed sown in a fertile soil; shall yield a rich harvest in future days, or in the ages of eternity. On the other hand, they are allowed to wander without inspection and order, if they are always turned away from the
are important subjects, grave enigma by iniquity, selfishness, or bigotry, if they are not the means of causing or aggravating accident, shouting into the mind whatever great move or emotion, - when such are our thoughts, become the height of the understanding by darkness, the strength of the mind so feeble, the woe so laying out, as it were, in our souls fountains of sin, of self, of unbridled criminal desires, evil propensities.

Again, consider how many words are uttered in the course of a single year, how important their influence may be. On that time, how much good is and many, we speak, how deeply may we this injure or bene fit ourselves or others? Imagine to yourself a man, who during a whole year uses the gift of speech, for pure, virtuous purposes only; who honours his Maker with his lips, who gives consolation to the mourning, encouragement to the depressed, who heals the cause of the innocent, who makes oppression tremble at his voice, who defends the interests of religion, virtue, who by sound advice, cheerful conversation does all he may to make other cheerful, to check the current of cor-

ous or crime. On the other hand, subject to yourself the opposite of this - a man, who suffers his tongue to go against God & virtue, who makes his Maker's name with more familiarity & contempt than be would that of the worst companion, with whom he associates, who is a tool of the world, who makes a jest of eternity, who spreads slander, falsehood, calumny, through society, who uses the noble gift of speech to seek absurd, foolish, stupid, hostility among neighbours, who by foul discourse corrupts the young & the innocent, encourages many more or frightens many from virtue. Reflect for a moment on the case of these two men, and is not a year important as it seems? Does the one, in the space of a year, say much, very much, to strengthen & improve his own, virtue & happiness? Does not the other in the same space, from much to deepen & darken his own guilt? We mean.

Once more, consider how many actions, good & bad, are performed in the course of a year. Every day we do something of one or another character. We are often quite to one or another point; we are conscientious of unconsci-
entails in the transactions of life. We daily enjoy the
bounties of heaven either with gratitude or with insen-
sibility of indifference, either with moderation or in arro-
gnmental manners or with ostentation of intemperance. We
are constantly gaining in virtue or in vice. The issue does
not shine when it is without seeing us engaged in some-
thing that is right or wrong. Everything we give for our
activity in the cause of virtue, if we have of duty of
truth, our submission to the will of heaven, our de-
ference to the commands of God is of fidelity to the so-
cial relations; else of view, obedience, pride, of our neglect,
of duty; contempt for the sagacity of God is tyranny,
unpity, our prosperity, or our shame. If this day
does not pass away without bearing testimony to some-
thing we have done, to what an almost incalculable
sum must our actions amount in the course of a year;
these actions will be good or bad according as we have
conducted ourselves. If nothing that we do is entirely
without effect, what numerous important consequences
must result from all that we do in the course of a
whole year. n. Thus the time we consider the silent pre-
tices of our minds, the thoughts, ideas, that fasten
them, or the works of our spirits, the conversation in which
we engage, is still further, the actions we have done, whether
of what we accomplish, we find that a year is a
thing of great importance in the life of man.
And to strengthen this conviction, consider still fur-
ther, that not only the time that is past is gone fore-
s, but that all we were in all we shall have gone with
it too. Do not imagine, that's what you neglect
in one year may be made up in another; that the harm
you do now you may hereafter repair. It is true you
may in bitterness of soul repent of your negligence or
your vice, if may resolve for the time to come to make
industrious to do better; but the effects of past ill
ness is guilt you cannot repair or avoid. What we
will do, if our lives are spared, we can in submittance to
the appointments of heaven, determine; but what we
have done is beyond our power to alter. The future, for
we have, in a great degree, belongs to us; but the past
is beyond our jurisdiction. If we have stood still when we ought to have been pressing forward, we shall never get so far as we had intended without an amount of laboration more or less. If we have neglected the duties of last year, we cannot crowd them into this. For this year has duties for its own. As he who should stand upon the river's brink, and call upon the wave that was rolled by him to flow back again, would call in vain, equally inhuman would our lives be to the voice, that should attempt to recall the doings of distant time. Not a moment can be brought back to him, who has sent it from him stained with crime, to have that stain taken out. There it stands, good and ill, forever adhering to the history of things. The seconding angel, may, puts down eternal lines. Years following years may remain for us to employ as we please. But the years we have missed, we can never improve. The page we have blotted, we can never make fair. Time to come may avenge from similar misfortune one; but the past that is lost no diligence can redeem. The writer may erase the lines that displease him in the volume, with his pencil, for the whole eye; the painter may exchange from his picture what he has incorrectly delineated in colors; but the moral agent cannot steal from the book of his life one single passage he has just seen there, however evil, nor is punishment to be the eye of his remembrance. Of this, such be the unalterable nature of the past, shall we not so improve time, while yet it is present, that we may hereafter look back upon it with joy? Does not a year assume an immense importance when we reflect, that that year will always have its record to present of what we have done, be it fair with virtue, or blackened with crime?

Again, the present time is important, because the future may take from us as many advantages for improvement by doing good, as we may expect. We are now perhaps in the vigor of health, prepared for the active enjoyment of virtues, and the more strenuous exercises of life. But the next year, it may be, will assign us duties of a juster sickness of our situation. The shades of insensibility may
pass over the eye that is now bright with joy. The love that once swayed with passion may be checked by influence; the spirits that were once buoyant may be sunk into despair. Now perhaps we are in circumstances of ease and leisure, but next year may find us so pressed by a variety of cares and overtaxed by a round of duties, that we shall scarcely be able to redeem time enough for more than a general leisure. As you have it may be, children, friends, acquaintances, these who are dear to you. So when you are dead, these for whose well-being in this world of troubles and anxieties, you may do much by your counsel, your example, your instruction, or your assistance; then let not the present go away unimproved, for perhaps not till you'll look back through these bright stars in your little firmament, will break the chain of your happiness, break the circle of your joys. If you are old, you to me, then, that you have not made them use your powers, but more for those whom you may still have placed beyond your reach. If you are young, you are perhaps blessed with parents, instructors, & monitors, the who may yet before you, lead you in the good path, remove obstacles, defend you from dangers, cooperate with you.

in improvements. Reflect on the golden opportunities of the stages while they are present. Another year, it may be, will arise that of these, who are men your proper guardians; will mourn the height of parental example, & remove the marks of parental kindness, & will then you upon the wide ocean of the world to trust to your own skill to preserve.Instances of this sort might be multiplied; but I have mentioned enough to show, that a year is an important space in the life of man, because it may present advantages of opportunities, helps, that may never occur again; if they are lost to you now, perhaps they are gone forever.

In the last place a year is important, because it may be the last we shall live. So it is expressed with solemn beauty by one lays: "the night cometh, when no man can work." Who can tell when that hour of darkness shall arise? It may be this week; it may be this year; even it must be. Perhaps the night of death will come as the night in the natural world: we may be warned of its approach by gathering shadows, by the gradual shutting in of the beams of the moon: one object after another may disappear;
things that have been are forgotten. When, therefore, we reflect, that earth referent to any one may be the last year that we shall enjoy the privilege of worshipping God, if doing his will in earth, of exercising ourselves in virtue, of being useful to mankind, of playing a broad foundation for the progressive happiness of eternity. It may be the last year in which we shall be called to repentance, if the stain of guilt is never on our hearts, we may be permitted to use the opportunity to rectify it off. Before the sun shall have finished another annual course, the voice of instruction may be silent; the light and showing us may be extinguished; these marks of these beants may be laid away in the dust; yet we ourselves may be among the
for evil. While we wish that the fruit of time, the year, may fall with a silent, gentle step as flowers only, let us not be disappointed if its fruits should be occasionally beset with misfortune. Life was has been, years will be, a dreary scene. We see enough evidence to convince us that we cannot trust tomorrow. During the last year, in this town, 25 have summoned to the grave. Among those are the friends, all the infirm, vigorous mannered, gray bearded, old age. And by computation, that the average of the ages of those who died last year, is 25 yrs. This is a little above the 21 yrs. of mortality would ordinarily produce; age, this is insufficient to remind us that our life is but a vapour; a transitory for a little time, then vanished away. Of those who have been thus called away from earth, many at the beginning of the last year were as well by全省 as ourselves. We met them in the house of God, in the intercourse of life, as they thought as little of death as we do now. Many, before another year's day, this very day, will be kind of some of us who are now assembled here. All those that are now in the house of God, who those may be, are

Others teach all eyes look on whom all creatures depend; we come to approach, let thee to ask for wisdom to enlighten our ignorance, to assist our weakness. Help us to form a just estimate of life, to keep steadily in view the object for which have been placed us here, & to have a deep impression of our duty of destination. May we look back in the past, & forward to the future, with those feelings of gratitude, & trust, & repentance not belong to finite, to beings in the presence of the infinite, to creatures in the presence of their Creator. We pray that we may be invited to improve the fleeting moment, as they pass, in preparation for our final home. We thank the Saviour, may become prepared for the glories of eternal bliss, through Him.
Grant that we may feel deeply the value of our time on earth, that our hearts may be impressed with the solemn recollection that while our days are passing away in one to another, they are constantly leaving us nearer to that tribunal, where we must answer for the deeds done in the body. And may, O God, while we look forward to the open heaven above us, we would raise our eyes to those who sit in the blessings. Let the merciful that have done us so kindly, spare us thy good Spirit to enlighten us. May we remember that this may be the last means by which earthly lives, if that hereafter shall be closed, may be summarized to appear at thy right hand. I propose us for the solemn feast of the Lord. We ask thy blessing on the inhabitants of this town during the approaching seasons. May the blessing of thy hands be provided rest upon them. Let the triumphs of the Lord's name here be known, and may they be succeeded to the powers of admission. And we pray, O God, that while we are called to notice the extent of time we may all improve the moments as they pass, that they may bring with them some joyful account of us, of that we shall be able to appeal to him for. When this year is the last of their lives, God only knows. It may be you; it may be me. And if we shall we not ask the works of Him that sent us, no. In me may we can. I be too wish that this year may be a happy year to you all. I too wish that it may find you faithful to your duty to God and man, that it may find you constantly improving, growing wise and more virtuous, cultivating the spirit of peace. May, of benevolence towards each other, gaining your lives with all the graces of the spiritual temple. May this year would indeed be a bright year for you, and something to prepare us for that world where days of years resolve us more.

Jan 1824.
At home, Jan. 14th, 1821 - afternoon.
At home, Dec. 31st, 1826 - afternoon.